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ABSTRACT

The effect of the Career Opportunities (COP) and the concept and movement of career education coincide; the element common to both is the linking of schooling and work throughout a person's lifetime. Career education basically involves three stages on the part of individuals: awareness, exploration, and training. Two later stages are career training and lifelong learning, and COP participants in particular are concerned with these. The career education field is experiencing problems, however, due to confusion with vocational education, career education's implied threat to traditional education, its antiintellectual and antihumanistic image, and its high cost. These problems have implications for the largely minority-group COP participants. The development of career education has been rapid but uneven, and its future depends on the commitment of schools and communities to solving its problems. (A reading list is appended.) (MDW)

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CAREER EDUCATION AND COP: A NATURAL COMBINATION

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The Dilemma of Career Choice

A quietly pleased COP participant receives her hard-earned degree and is able to make a solid career choice -- full-time teaching in the school where she has been cafeteria helper, receptionist, and instructional aide. Another, still in midstream as student and paraprofessional, is trying to decide whether to focus on special education or elementary school teaching. Still another, three years out of Viet Nam, has teaching on his mind but his long-range goal is a career in educational administration. A fourth participant escorts her sixth-grade class to places where adults spend their days. They talk to a lawyer in a courtroom, to a bulldozer operator clearing a field, to a surgical nurse running a hospital operating room. They watch and compare and they acquire knowledge of the settings and values of adults at work. For all too soon they will be making decisions about organizing and filling their own adult lives, just as the participants in the Career Opportunities Program have made theirs.

Will they -- COP participant and schoolchild -- know enough? Does anyone? Can their decisions be balanced and sufficiently informed? Is there a rational link between available opportunities in the marketplace and individuals' aspirations? Will their abilities be misjudged or their potential overlooked? Will they know from personal experience what working at a career job is all about? Or about changing from one to another?

There are no set responses to these large questions, whether they apply to the COP world or to the far larger world of work beyond it. Nor would anyone in the educational world -- or in business or labor or the other professions -- claim that their fields possess special understanding of what careers are all about. And it is doubtful that any number of wise words and in-depth counseling by trained and fully reputable guidance counselors would provide more than partial answers. No one, in short, has all of the keys to open all of the doors.

But the answers are not necessarily behind locked doors. Most, but not all, of them are out in the open -- at various places in different forms -- waiting to be found and assembled in sensible fashion. They are not answers that any single sector of today's educational enterprise can provide. Some of them emerge protected by labels like career awareness, mid-life career change, career choice, or career development -- or, carried to a logical end, educational reform. For education reform is what career education seeks, and it is already beginning to happen.

Schooling and Work: The Essential COP Connection

Career education and COP appear to have been made for each other. As Dr. Kenneth B. Hoyt, USOE Associate Commissioner for Career Education, told COP conferees in Dallas this past March, COP is an excellent example of what career education is all about. The COP model with its myriad forms and varieties makes the essential connection between schooling and work, and that's part of the terrain career education is increasingly coming to occupy. COP participants already in the world of work learn new skills and develop new sensitivities in preparation for their move into full-time teaching. For almost all it means a career switch, and for many it is not the first. One of the main sources of COP's strength is the tremendous range of life and job experiences its participants have brought to the program. It is not too difficult to find COP people whose career progression, before they decided on teaching, had already led them through several significant career experiences -- social worker, domestic, salesperson, business machine operator, music teacher, cook, soldier (and sailer, airman, marine), merchant seaman, entertainer, laborer. If no single COP participant has had all of these experiences, it is a safe bet that many can claim two or more as well as others too varied to mention.

At this stage of its evolution, career education means many things to many COP projects -- and they're all correct. In Memphis, Tennessee, it involves big roles for the project and its people in that city's SPAN (Start Planning Ahead Now) and Model Careers programs. For Miami, Florida, it has meant intensive orientation workshops and a greatly heightened awareness of the connection between schooling and life-styles and work. The Worcester, Massachusetts, COP project has two well-equipped career development and information centers staffed by COP paraprofessionals who underwent intensive special training in career education as part of their college training. In rural Hillsville, Virginia, COP participants have been closely tied to the Carroll County Public Schools Title III Careers Development Model. Additional examples abound throughout the COP network. Career education has thus become a vital part of COP. And, significantly, no USOE mandate or guideline stipulated that COP projects had to have any link with career education.

To the educational generalist or layman, career education has probably come to symbolize that part of the educational process that relates most closely to "making it" in the adult world of work. In a loose sense, a school system's career education effort would thus include, or be included by, vocational education. It would surely involve the school counselor, who, perhaps more than anyone else in the school building, has professional insight into the world beyond the school and can help guide students wisely and realistically into it. In many cases, especially where sympathetic administrators can make funds available, it might center on one or a set of small career development centers (or possibly, as in Dallas, a huge one). Some districts might treat

career education as an opportunity to involve their business and professional communities as hosts to visiting students who are exploring career options, or as guests in the classroom. All of these and many other manifestations are legitimate features of career education. They are proliferating rapidly and directly affecting COP in many educational situations.

But COP is not an exact mirror reflection of what is happening in American education or society. Its clientele is special and its goals do not necessarily correspond in full with those of middle-class America. Many of the issues that beset COP's 132 projects are unknown in privileged and affluent suburbia or even in blue-collar communities. Some problems are not always shared, or even identifiable, in the low-income constituencies of COP. Is career education relevant, for example, in settings where career options have been traditionally limited? Even more to the point, does it have anything to offer people on the lower levels of the economic ladder? Ultimately, one must ask, does or can career education say anything to minority Americans? Or does it represent still another version of tracking, which has consigned so much human potential to the educational junkpile?

The answers are only beginning to emerge. They will not be entirely clear until career education has been defined and its full dimensions delineated. It is an idea whose time has come -- it was long overdue, in fact -- but as career education programs come into our schools, even its strongest advocates caution that many years of careful work are still ahead. They know what the concept of career education is, but the outlines of what it may become are just beginning to come into focus.

Career Education as Concept and Movement

At its core, career education is both a concept and a movement. In Dr. Hoyt's quest for a definition, "career" is "the totality of work one does in his or her lifetime," and "education" is "the totality of experiences through which one learns." Thus "career education" can be defined generically as "the totality of educational experiences through which one learns about work." This does not mean that other, nonwork-oriented goals are excluded from the educational process. Dr. Hoyt makes it abundantly clear that career education "emphasizes education as preparation for work as one of the basic goals of American education." It is not the only goal, nor is it "even necessarily the most important goal for any student or for any educational system." Equally fundamental are several key assumptions of career education on which considerable consensus has already been reached:

--It is not confined to the school years alone but must span an entire productive life, from preschool through the retirement years, and it is for everyone regardless of age, sex, mental or physical capacity (or limitation), or level of schooling.

--It embraces all productive work, whether salaried, voluntary, leisure-oriented, or home-based.

--It envisages every person leaving the American educational system with a salable work skill.

--It cannot succeed without genuine, not token, collaboration among all sectors of American schooling and work -- business, industry, organized labor, schools at all levels, communities, and, of crucial importance, all of the sectors (vocational, academic, and other) of the educational establishment.

--It must center on and foster the individual's ultimate capacity in making basic judgments concerning his or her career choice, entry, progression, or change.

--Finally, it attempts to help everyone obtain the requisite skills to perform work that is both satisfying and beneficial to society.

Thus career education is emerging, at least on the surface, as neither pretentious nor discriminatory (more on this below) but exceedingly ambitious.

Perhaps you are wondering what a typical career education program looks like and how it compares with COP's operational design. To this there is a simple answer: there's no such thing as a typical career education program. For even at this very early stage in the history of career education, no single model dominates the scene. In fact, career education in action makes penny ante poker of Mao's "let a hundred flowers bloom" pontification of a generation ago. And this, career education's principal sponsors avow, is as it should be. Nothing would be more self-defeating than to inhibit a developing, and critically necessary, movement by harnessing it to a predetermined, prepackaged project design. Thus career education activities take many forms in many contexts for many constituencies. Federal pump-priming -- and career education has in very large degree been sparked by the United States Office of Education and former Commissioner Sidney B. Marland -- has catalyzed the development of a wide range of experimental or pilot models, and state and local support have encouraged even more.

The Structural Ingredients of Career Education

As career education evolves, then, it is essential to locate the stages and common structural elements that would enable a school district to embrace it. These are relatively easy to find, and there is considerable agreement on them. If consensus exists that education and work are indissolubly linked throughout a person's lifetime, it is only a short step to a sensible

chronological breakdown which asks no more than the individuals in a career education process can be expected to give. These stages progress as follows:

1. Awareness. Career education in the early schooling years is viewed by the new breed of practitioners as a stage in which pupils begin to develop an awareness of themselves and of the world of work. Job training as such is probably not advisable before the middle or even junior high school years. In practice, elementary schools engaged in career education attempt to expose children to adults at work, either at the adults' workplace or by means of school visits by parents or willing careerists from the community. Teachers sensitized to career education attempt to demonstrate how the learning that occurs in the classroom is tied to the larger world outside. Increasing numbers of curriculum units which are sometimes expensive but always vital, are becoming available. It would certainly be worthwhile for COP project people in small, large, and decentralized school systems to acquaint themselves with materials and practices as they become available.

2. Exploration. At the middle or junior high school level, career education can become somewhat more focused. The students' curiosity and interests lead them to any attractive possibility for obtaining straight answers. At this age it becomes possible for schoolchildren to sample hands-on experiences, develop a sense of the job marketplace, become aware of their own potential and interests, begin to receive professional guidance, and start to build work skills. But it is also an impressionable stage of growth and career educators must be cautious about using their material wisely.

3. Training. In career education's ideal world, which is admittedly still small and widely scattered, the typical high schooler is no longer classified as a general, vocational, or academic student. By the eleventh or twelfth grade, the student is presumed to have determined his or her basic career goals and desires and to be doing something tangible to achieve them. While not fixed in one field for eternity, he or she should be acquiring at least one basic marketable skill whether the ultimate destination is to be teaching philosophy at Oxford or repairing air conditioners in Biloxi. The implications for secondary school education are enormous and far-reaching. Even the commitment to produce graduates with salable competencies -- regardless of whether they terminate their formal schooling at high school graduation or

> much later -- could cause a near-revolution in American high schools. More, perhaps, than any other, this commitment forces the newcomer to realize that career education is not a cosmetic rearranging of old values and practices; it is for real. And it could be enormously expensive.

These three basic school-centered phases of career education could take a mind-boggling variety of forms. The same applies to the later stages -- "definitive" career training and lifelong learning -- which complete the span. The former is of particular interest, for it is here, at the level of the adult at work and in a college setting, that the typical COP participant is functioning. In definitive career training, the learner may be involved in a trade or vocational school, at college either immediately after high school or some years later, or, as in many cases, already on a career ladder or lattice. The assumption is that the individual has zeroed in on the ultimate work goal, as COP participants have done. He or she may already be using, or have used, the marketable skill obtained in high school. Without this marketable skill, as some career educators state, the entire scenario dissolves or is immeasurably weakened.

Lifelong learning, the fifth phase of career education, can imply career change, professional upgrading through training, or a wide range of ever-expanding options for workers of all ages in all fields. Here, too, COP has a substantial stake. Many COP participants are proud second (or third or fourth) careerists, and a significant number of COP project directors, drawn from many walks of educational life, are themselves potential subjects for career adjustment.

Some Problem Areas

In spite of all the optimism, it must be stated that the career education picture is by no means a rosy one. Its critics have been many and vocal, although some have reduced their opposition or adopted a "wait and see" stance. Their reservations nonetheless offer career educators much to think about. Some appear well-grounded, but even the seemingly irrational deserve the attentive ear of the promoters of a significant new development in American education. In no particular order, because they do not lend themselves to hierarchical ranking, the following problems have caused career educators varying degrees of concern:

1. Confusion with Vocational Education. It is alleged that many of the leading apostles and practitioners of career education are restyled or power-hungry vocational educators and that the movement itself is a glamorized version of vocational education. The charge has superficial validity in that vocational education plays a big role in career education and that no one is better equipped to link the two than the experienced professionals who run our

industrial/technical/agricultural/vocational educational enterprises. And career education all too often finds its bureaucratic home in state, local, and university departments of vocational education. But it is new and is only now achieving its own identity. More and more separate career education organizations are being set up. They relate effectively -- and necessarily -- with the vocational educators; in a gratifying degree, these entities relate equally effectively with business, labor, academic departments, and the large array of other potential partners needed to make career education work. But the confusion in labeling persists. Even Harvard University's quarterly, Inequality in Education, devoted a recent issue to "Perspectives on Vocational Education and Career Education" and managed to intertwine the two to the benefit of neither.

2. Threat to Established Order. When any doctrine sounds like it means to dislodge entrenched interests -- which career education by and large does not intend to do -- it can be justly accused of over-reaching. If career education is indeed a threat, the danger is to those who perceive little need for change and virtually none for the linkage between education and work that career education symbolizes. The movement must exercise great care, however, to avoid creating the impression that business, labor, and industry are about to invade and eventually dominate our schools. They will become involved as career education advisers, but their role will not be to exert control over a community's educational process. Any such incursion, as many COP participants know from personal experience in various educational and political activities, would alienate the schools and doom career education.

3. Anti-Intellectualism and Antihumanism. Although career education's top advocates possess excellent academic credentials and credibility, the movement's image is not entirely clear, and its heavy emphasis on careers rather than intellectual accomplishment for its own sake does raise questions about its possible anti-intellectualism. Its proponents are quick to deflate this skepticism, but their argument -- that career education is not all of education, that it does not inhibit purely intellectual pursuits, that the liberal arts have nothing to fear -- is not yet entirely persuasive. With its focus on economic reality, the marketplace, and the development of the career-oriented individual, career education needs to obtain the understanding and support of those in walks of life that are

less oriented to these directions. This issue is of great importance to COP. For if, as some suspect, career education tends to head people toward careers in industry, business, and scientific or technical specialties, the result could be a downgrading of human services careers. And this, of course, is what COP is about.

4. High Cost. As a dollars-and-cents affair, the installation of comprehensive career education programs would require new spending. Federal funding, which has helped spur career education's early development, is unpredictable. So are state contributions. While such states as Arizona, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, and California, among others, have been extraordinarily generous, others are skeptical about authorizing large outlays for a new, untested reform effort. Some local education agencies have also contributed, but the picture is markedly uneven in an era of tight budgets and taxpayer resistance. The real expense, career educators point out, is in commitment -- by schools, teachers, students, and communities. Once these are obtained, acquiring the needed funds should be easier.

Implications for Minorities

Of direct concern to COP are the implications of career education in both personal and career terms for people who are not from middle-class, white, or professional class backgrounds. Some see it as still another device to track students into prearranged "career" niches in manual or semiskilled labor. The risk is there, but the intention is not.

To many of a representative group of the country's minorities (101 Blacks, 29 Chicanos, 7 Puerto Ricans, 12 Japanese-Americans, 20 Native Americans, 20 Chinese-Americans, and assorted others plus 83 white Americans) who gathered in Washington in February 1973 for a national conference sponsored by USOE on "Career Education: Implications for Minorities," career education was viewed, at least initially, as an essentially exclusionary device to keep minorities from sharing in American prosperity. Some saw it as reinforcing occupational role stereotyping for women and minorities. Most, however, appeared willing to give career education a change; they would avoid either endorsing or opposing it but demand a substantial voice in assuring that it does not in fact become a vehicle for perpetuating past injustices.

Throughout the Washington conference, there was explicit recognition, articulated by a tremendous range of speakers, that economic and occupational inequality remains a pervasive fact of American life. Not only is black and brown unemployment disproportionately high, especially among teenagers, but,

(a) white workers earn 50 percent more than Black workers and (b) the best paid 20 percent of all white workers earn 600 percent more than the worst paid fifth of all white workers. These are not just the seeds of potential inequality, they are extremely uncomfortable facts of life.

A partial listing of participant concerns on the effects and implications of career education for minorities reveals serious reservations centering mostly on issues of implicit racism and sexism, governance and representation of minority groups in decision making on career education, training on a bicultural and bilingual basis, funding, development of incentives for equal educational opportunity, job placement, improvement of teacher education, inclusion of labor and management, and a role for youth. In a speech to the conference, Congressman Augustus F. Hawkins of California touched on several of these concerns and cautioned minority representatives not to pass over such urgent objectives as achieving "simple verbal and computational skills necessary to qualify for a job or career" in favor of "occupational awareness training." He urged educators not to succumb to "hoopla" but to make sure that minority children are not diverted "from the roads to higher education to the paths of occupational training." Experience, Congressman Hawkins noted, "has taught us [minority communities] to be cynical about panaceas."

Of many revealing features of this conference (for which the U.S. Office of Education deserves credit for courage; it withstood a ferocious beating on the floor, in minority caucuses, and in the corridors -- by its own carefully chosen invitees!), the statements and recommendations of the minority caucuses may ultimately tell the most. For they focus on the kinds of career education issues that would be of the greatest importance to COP participants as they enter teaching careers and orient themselves even more closely to the problems and hopes of children who do not come from three-car, split-level suburban families.

The Black Caucus, like most of the others, saw the role of Black leaders in the planning and governance of career education to be a fundamental imperative guiding any large-scale career education program. Of even higher priority, it declared, was the task of assessing career education needs from the standpoints of students, community, and staff as well as the labor market (a recurring item) and the career-oriented curriculum in the schools. To the Native American Caucus, the fostering of identity in any national career education thrust, and participation by all Indian groups appeared to matter most. The emphasis on cultural and linguistic uniqueness as well as on obtaining a larger piece of the action was at the heart of the Chicano Caucus' formal resolution which, among other strongly voiced recommendations, called for career education "to incorporate entrance procedures which would not screen" Chicanos out of medical, law, dental, and graduate schools.

State of the Scene

The rapid proliferation of programs with some or all of the features normally found in career education and the absence of a fully agreed upon definition cloud any effort to arrive at credible statistics as to where and in what form career education is to be found. It appears fair and safe to say these things about it.

1. Its growth in less than four years or so since career education first received heavy national attention has been phenomenal. It is clearly not a fad but rather a response (even if of uneven quality in these early days) to a national need to build closer ties between school and the economy, or, as some would prefer to describe it, between education and individual life-styles or society as a whole. In one form or another, career education has penetrated the consciousness of educators throughout the country; in some school settings it is already creating a revolution and greatly altered expectations.

2. Many state departments of education have begun to mandate changes leading to career education, sometimes as a direct result of new legislation or appropriations. This awareness is heartening, but comprehensive designs are often absent, and some of the activities, while necessary, are fragmentary and uncoordinated. In some cases, for example, career education funds are used to strengthen vocational education, hire counselors, develop highly specialized curriculum materials, or upgrade basic skills. In others such as Arizona, a whole state system is undergoing fundamental changes embracing virtually all phases and concepts of career education.

3. At the local level the picture is markedly uneven. There are local systems so beleaguered by problems of budget, discipline, drugs, etc., that even the mention of something that sounds new triggers automatic resistance. Then there is the Skyline Career Development Center in Dallas, a justifiably renowned entity that embraces virtually every viable feature of career education at the high school level. Only three years old, it serves 20 high schools and 3,000 adults in a wide variety of career clusters and fields. It is the nerve center of Dallas' career education effort, with a complete high school and up-to-the-minute technical facilities on its 80-acre, $2 million campus. Significantly, it derives substantial support from over 200 business and industry members of its various advisory councils.

4. Without federal support and heavy personal commitments by Dr. Marland, USOE Commissioner John Ottina, and Deputy Commissioner William Pierce, among others, career education might have sputtered its way into early oblivion or, at best, an indefinite future. Instead, a solid support base exists in USOE and in the two-year-old National Institute of Education, where significant resources are being expended to develop new directions and to support existing models and experimental projects. Both agencies have made strong presentations for congressional appropriations for the coming fiscal year. Even when a separate congressional appropriation for fiscal year 1974 for USOE's developing program did not survive negotiation on Capitol Hill, there was no slowing down of USOE's work in the field. Indeed, Dr. Kenneth Hoyt, one of the nation's leading authorities on career education, became Associate Commissioner for Career Education halfway through the fiscal year. (Not coincidentally, a significant area of Dr. Hoyt's responsibility in the U.S. Office of Education is the administration of most of the programs, including COP, of the Education Professions Development Act.)

Outlook

The leaders of the career education effort have generally been reluctant to run the risk of stunting its broad-ranged growth by forcing it into a definitional mold. In career education's earliest days as a national thrust underwritten in very large degree by the federal government, the straitjacket of a formal definition was consciously avoided. The growth of the movement and the commonalities of existing program efforts have clarified the field somewhat, and a clearer, all-embracing statement is now possible. Such a statement appeared in Career Education: What It Is and How To Do It (see Further Reading below):

> Career education is the total effort of public education and the community to help all individuals to become familiar with the values of a work-oriented society, to integrate these values into their personal value systems, and to implement these values in their lives in such a way that work becomes possible, meaningful, and satisfying to each individual.

This is not the definition of a phase of education or of a fad or of a meticulously constructed program. Nor does it in any way detract from the over-riding goal of equal educational opportunity. Properly implemented, it should do much to help all Americans achieve that goal. It is instead a kind of credo with which students, educators, parents, and the business-labor-industry community should be able to identify without in any way changing their moral, political, or basic educational values.

Can it be carried out? If the evidence presented here, which is but a small fraction of a rapidly growing body, has any credibility, the answer must be affirmative. But not unqualifiedly so. There are many roadblocks. Old traditions don't disappear at the wave of a wand. Institutions of higher education are generally far behind the public schools in acknowledging the school-work relationship. Money, as mentioned earlier, is not easy to find. Curriculum materials need the most exhaustive testing. Many secondary schools remain convinced that their principal function is to get students into college, not to equip them with marketable skills and relatively highly developed career interests. The identification with vocational education remains a source of confusion in many organizational and bureaucratic quarters. Perhaps topping the list is the need to achieve comprehensiveness -- in outlook, in substance, and, above all, in participation. To succeed, career education must have the fullest possible commitment of the schools and the direct, unselfish involvement of the communities in which they function.

Further Reading

Like the movement itself, material on career education is growing. There are "quickies" written to capitalize on career education's new fame, and there are serious works by reputable leaders in the field. In between is a rapidly accumulating body of "how to" materials as well as a respectable, but by no means complete, collection of instructional and curricular materials. In late 1973, Northern Illinois University was selected to establish an Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) in Career Education. ERIC will presumably become the major source of documentation on career education. Further information may be obtained from the Clearinghouse in Career Education, Northern Illinois University, 204 Gurler, DeKalb, Illinois 60115.

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